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The Poet and Inspiration

esthetic terms something—not all—of his reactions to the creation of poetry. One responds gently to his words; one's eyes are softened by glimpses of his heaven; one feels the blending of Catholicism with his art. But I should have been content with the beatitudes alone. They make the music that sustains the rest.

Berenice K. Van Slyke

IRISH ANTHOLOGIES

Anthology of Irish Verse, edited, with an *Introduction*, by Padraic Colum. Boni & Liveright.

Irish Poets of Today: An Anthology, compiled by L. D'O. Walters. E. P. Dutton & Co.

It has been the peculiar misfortune of the rich and lovely body of Anglo-Irish poetry that no adequate anthology has yet been made of it. The two outstanding attempts in this direction hitherto have been the *Golden Treasury of Irish Poetry* and the *Dublin Book of Irish Verse*; but in both these collections, especially the former, there is such a deal of chaff that the discouraged reader will with difficulty find the wheat. The reason for this result is largely that the compilers included too much material, and chose most of it from the earlier and middle decades of the nineteenth century, a period when the true Irish had not yet fully mastered the English idiom; with the consequence that their poetry written in English was apt to be either imitative or cramped in expression. With a few exceptions, it is only since the eighteen-

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eighties, with the appearance of the group headed by W. B. Yeats, that the native Irish have become masters of English style. Accordingly a satisfactory anthology, which to my mind means a selection of the best, must be drawn largely from the poetry of this period.

The two collections recently published might conceivably satisfy this long-felt want. When we take up Mrs. Walters' volume, however, it is a keen disappointment to find that, so far from being over-crowded, its hundred or more pages are entirely inadequate to cover its chosen field. Some of the most important poets, like Eva Gore-Booth and Nora Chesson, are represented by only a single poem each. And the selections show little real discrimination; for example, the two lyrics by Dora Sigerson give no hint of the powerful and stark ballad poetry which is her best title to fame. Moreover, a number of important authors, such as Eleanor Cox and Alice Milligan, are omitted altogether, while such relatively insignificant writers as Isobel Huske and Patrick Chalmers are given place. What this collection gives us is not bad, but it is not good enough.

The second collection is edited by that real poet and true Irishman Padraic Colum, who states in his preface that his anthology is intended to give a representation of the Irish national spirit throughout its history. From such a standpoint nothing but praise can be given to this volume, which is a discriminating and effective revelation of that vital and subtle spirit which is Ireland, from its

Irish Anthologies

earliest recorded manifestation in the fifth century A. D. down to the present day. But Mr. Colum's title should have indicated his intention and not have misled us as it does. The unsuspecting reader will take up this book expecting to find in it the best of Anglo-Irish poetry; but instead he will find a large part of it devoted to patriotic and personal verse popular in its day but essentially journalistic and temporary. For unfortunately a poem may be an excellent example of a national spirit, and still be bad poetry. In other words, Mr. Colum's collection, excellent as it is in its own field, is yet not a real anthology of Anglo-Irish verse.

In spite of these two volumes therefore, the Irish poetic genius, as expressed in English, with its special racial passion, its novel feeling for words and figures, and its haunting and peculiar music, still awaits a satisfactory anthology.

Jack Lyman

TRANSLATING OLD ENGLISH

Old English Poetry: Translations into Alliterative Verse, by J. Duncan Spaeth. Princeton University Press.

Widsith, Beowulf, Finnsburgh, Waldere, Deor, translated by Charles Scott Moncrieff. E. P. Dutton & Co.

Someone is always taking the joy out of life, for book reviewers, by attempting a poetic translation, in the original rhythmical structure, of a foreign poem. Once in a hundred times the attempt is successful. In translations of Old English poetry into modern English, the proportion